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ABSTRACT

The Academic Internship Program for Handicapped Students at the University of California, Riverside, focuses on the multiple career development problems faced by college students with physical disabilities. The problems these students face include a narrow range of career exposure, lack of work experience, prejudice and stereotyping by employers, and lack of interest in their career development by faculty members. The project addresses these problems by providing students with part time paid and volunteer internships, educating local employers concerning their support of the internship program, and encouraging more active involvement of faculty in the career development of these students. The booklet includes sections on the following: faculty involvement, project management and staffing, internship development, placement of interns, resolution of student transportation problems, career development, program relationship to support services and allied professionals, and future plans. (SBH)

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An Experiential Learning Model for Students with Disabilities:

Internships and Career Development

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Academic Internship Center
Career Planning and Placement Center
University of California, Riverside

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An Experiential Learning Model for Students with Disabilities: Internships and Career Development

Project Coordinators: Virginia Boyle
Deborah McCoy

This project was supported by a grant through
the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education

Contents

Introduction 3

Background 3
The Academic Internship Program at UCR 4
Need 5
Project Objectives 5

Project Management . 6

Organizational Chart 6
Project Staffing 7
Advisory Board 9

Program Activities 9

Identification of Students and Assessment of Needs 9
Faculty Involvement 9

Internship Development 10

Placement of Interns 11
Transportation of Interns 12
Career Development 13

Education and Information Sharing Activities 14

Conferences 14
Workshops and Seminars 14
Support Services 14
Allied Professionals 14

Future Plans 15

Introduction

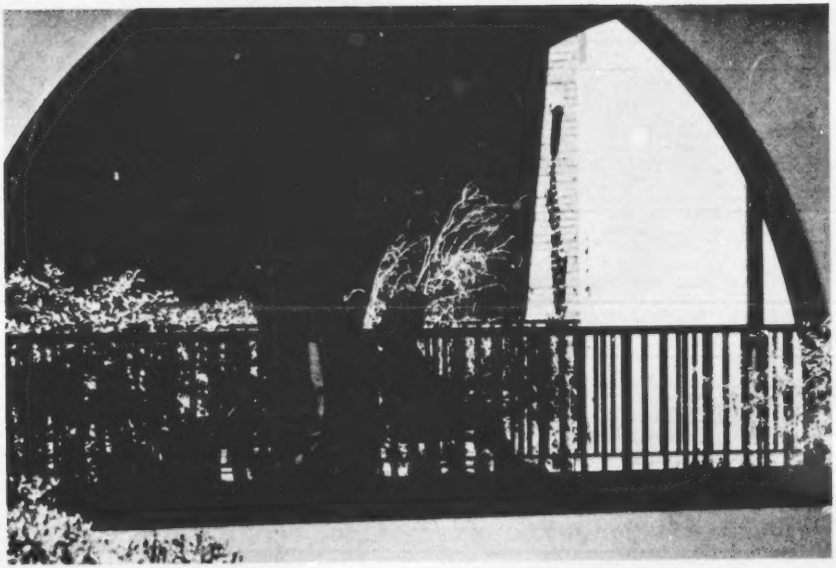
The Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities is a program that was initiated by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The project was entitled: "Experiential Learning Program for Special Students: Handicapped Clientele". Project activities began in late August, 1977, and continued through July, 1979.

The purpose of the project was to provide services to students with disabilities which would enable them to explore career alternatives and to clarify educational goals through meaningful internship experiences. The project was also designed to inform employers about legislation for the employment of the handicapped, to assist in making facilities accessible and to overcome attitudinal barriers to employment of persons with disabilities.

Background

The University of California, Riverside, with a student body of 4600, offers curricula in the liberal arts and natural and agricultural sciences. Because of the mild southern California climate, the flat terrain and the almost total accessibility to facilities, UCR has the highest percentage of students with physical disabilities of any of the nine University of California campuses. The disabilities of these students include visual impairments, spinal cord injuries, hearing impairments, rheumatoid arthritis, neuromuscular control disorders, bone diseases, hemophilia, respiratory diseases, epilepsy, severe heart conditions and various orthopedic problems.

UCR's traditional orientation has been one of high academic standards and sound preparation for professional schools and academic research. With changing career patterns, a need arose to help students bridge the gap between education and employment. In response to this need, the Academic Internship Center was established in 1975.



The Academic Internship Program at UCR

The Academic Internship Program is an important part of the overall mission of the University to provide students with an excellent education. This includes offering the opportunity to learn in a non-academic environment in business, industry, or the public sector. Through these off-campus experiences, the students are better able to develop realistic career goals.

An academic internship involves a direct relationship between the student, the faculty sponsor, the on-site supervisor, and the staff of the Academic Internship Center. The Academic Internship Center advises and screens students, works with employers to set up volunteer or paid internships, and consults with faculty to ensure that the internships provide valid learning experiences with ex-

plicit objectives and rigorous evaluation. Students are largely responsive to this opportunity and approximately seventy to eighty students are placed in internships each quarter.

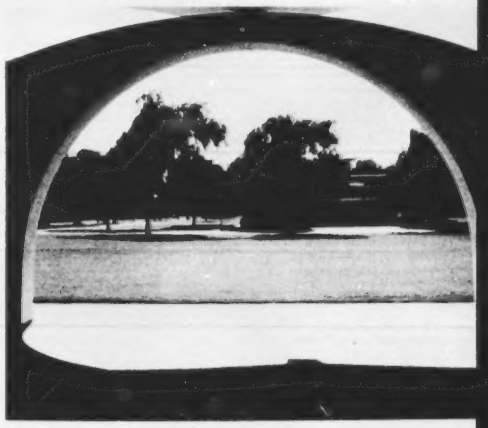
Need

The Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities developed from the need for these special students to have practical experience that would lead to career opportunities and preparation for employment. Many of the students with disabilities had very little work experience and few opportunities to try their skills. They had little or no contact with employment processes and lacked awareness of the range of career opportunities available to them. The result was that they were not prepared to become employed.

Project Objectives

Keeping in mind the special needs of students with disabilities, project goals were formulated. Through the first several months of activities goals and objectives were reshaped and restated to meet high priority needs and to realistically reflect what actually could be accomplished. This process resulted in the following project objectives:

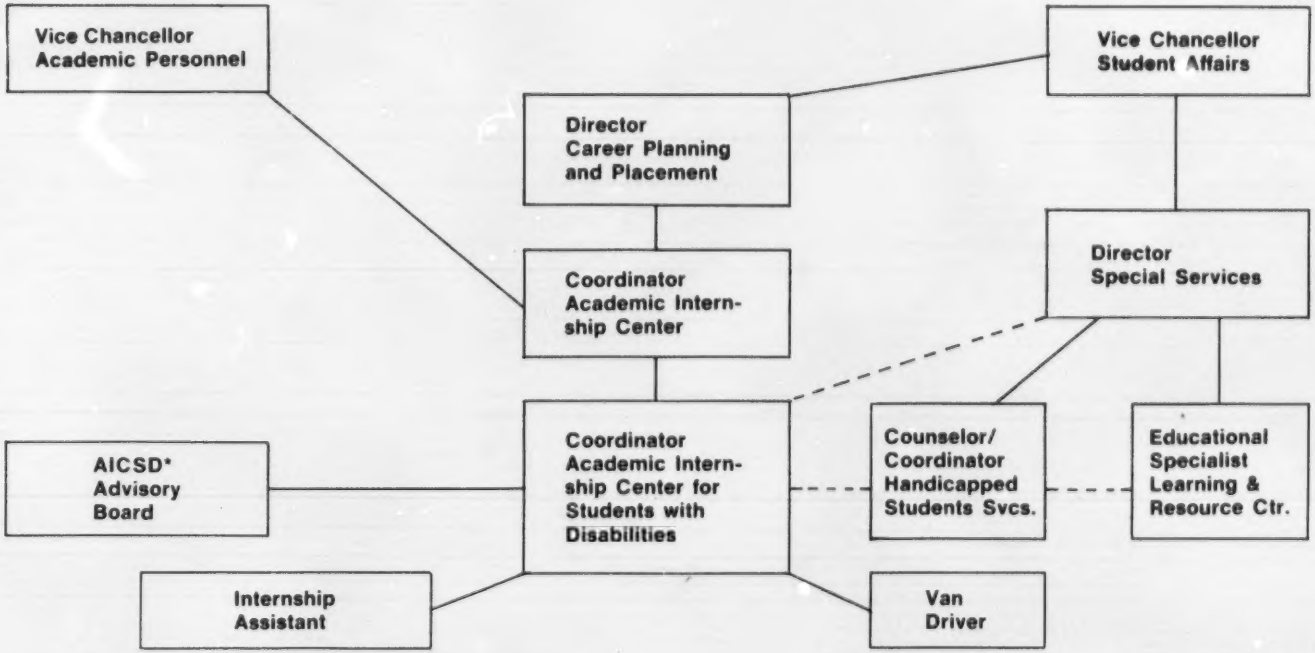
1. To provide internship placement services and career education programs specifically for students with disabilities.
2. To educate employers in business, industry, and government agencies concerning the capabilities and potentialities of persons with disabilities.
3. To increase faculty participation in the proposed specialized internship program and the Academic Internship Center activities in general.
4. To provide for an objective and ongoing method of program direction, coordination and evaluation.
5. To begin development of a replicable model of the program for subsequent dissemination to interested professionals and organizations.



Project Management

Organizational Chart

The Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities is housed in the Career Planning and Placement Center. However, because internships at UCR have a substantial academic component, the Internship Coordinator for Students with Disabilities reports to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Personnel, as well as to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs.


Vice Chancellor Academic Personnel
Vice Chancellor Student Affairs
Director Career Planning and Placement
Director Special Services
Coordinator Academic Internship Center
AICSD* Advisory Board
Coordinator Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities
Counselor/ Coordinator Handicapped Students Svcs.
Educational Specialist Learning & Resource Ctr.
Internship Assistant
Van Driver

*Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities.

Project Staffing

The staffing pattern was developed to integrate the educational activities of students with disabilities with their internship activities, and to provide career counseling and employment information to students.

Position	Description of Responsibilities	Percentage of time on AICSD
Director, Career Planning and Placement	Coordinates and supervises all functions of Career Planning & Placement Center and Academic Internship Center	15%
Coordinator, Academic Internship Center	Coordinates and supervises functions of the Academic Internship Center and Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities	25%
Coordinator, Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities	Coordinates all internship and career planning functions for students with disabilities. Counsels and places students with disabilities in internships. Develops internships suitable for students with disabilities.	100%
Peer Counselor	Assists students in resume writing and interviewing techniques.	20%
Senior Typist Clerk	Provides clerical support to Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator of the Academic Internship Center.	57%
Student Assistant (transportation) 15 hours/week	Drives van to transport students with disabilities to and from internship sites.	50%

Advisory Board

Throughout the project, policy was monitored by an Advisory Board consisting of two faculty members, two employers, two handicapped students, a representative from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, a staff member from the University Handicapped Services Department, and the staff of the Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities. The board met on a monthly basis the first year, and quarterly the second year, providing the Center with direction and feedback on its program activities.

Program Activities

Identification of Students and Assessment of Needs

Students with physical disabilities were identified through several channels. The Special Services Office publicized the internship program and referrals were made by the Counselor/Coordinator of the Handicapped Student Services. Special Services also supplied the Internship Center with a list of currently enrolled disabled students who were contacted by mail and telephone to set up individual appointments for internship advisement. During these appointments, the student's maturity level, work experience, academic standing and career interests were assessed in planning for eventual internship placement. Students were also contacted through the Disabled Students Union, the campus radio station and the student newspaper.

Faculty Involvement

Each academic department appointed a faculty adviser to the Internship Center for Students with Disabilities. The advisers worked cooperatively with the Coordinator of AICSD in encouraging students to participate in the program. They were also responsible for representing the Internship Center during department policy-making sessions and for orienting the other faculty members to the program.

Internship Development

Throughout the course of the first two years of the project, over 150 employers were contacted to identify placement opportunities for student interns. The majority of responses were remarkably positive with approximately 100 employers offering internships to students. These employers included various businesses, industries, banks, municipal and county offices, environmental agencies, schools, human resource agencies, and hospitals.

The initial contacts with employers were made by telephone. Employers were chosen to be contacted through a variety of methods. If a student was seeking work experience in an area not yet explored in terms of internship possibilities, the coordinator began with the telephone book, with local industrial directories, or with contacts made through the general internship program. An effort was made to contact the head of the department where the internship was sought, in addition to approaching the personnel department. If the original telephone contact went well, an appointment was made to talk with the employer in person and to check the work site for accessibility.

At the time of the first visit, a full explanation of the internship program was given including information about the academic credit offered by the University, the number of hours the students would be available to work, the level of skill the employer might expect, the various disciplines taught at UCR, the types of limitations various disabilities might impose, and the kind of support and supervision that could be expected from the Academic Internship Center. If the employer expressed a definite interest, a tour of the work facility followed. A check for accessibility was made to

ascertain that there was handicapped parking available, that there were appropriate curb cuts, that the ground was relatively level between the parking area and the building, that doorways were wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair, that there were ramps around or over any steps, that there was an elevator if the building was multi-storied, and that restroom facilities were accessible.

Employers were cooperative in making their work sites accessible to the interns. Special parking places were labeled, curbs beveled, doors removed to allow a wheelchair to pass, desks were raised and furniture rearranged. The Internship Coordinator served as a consultant to the employers in advising how changes might best be made and also in apprising the employer of tax incentives for accessibility expenses.

Overall, the employers have been very receptive to the concept of working with interns with disabilities. This presents the opportunity to observe and evaluate interns before actually hiring them. Furthermore, most employers recognize that affirmative action plans must include goals for hiring employees with disabilities. The AICSD assists employers with identifying possible employees in this category and with modifying facilities for accessibility.

The internships were individually designed, allowing for constructive and creative input by interns, and with close supervision by employers.

Examples of typical internships in which students participated were research analyst intern, Veteran's Administration Hospital; public awareness intern, Search and Serve Program, Riverside County Schools; computer intern, Xerox Systems Corporation; stockbroker intern, Wagenseller and Durst, Inc.; and public safety intern, UCR Public Safety Department.*

*A listing of internships can be found in the separate publication "Internship Opportunities Bulletin: Students with Disabilities" available through the Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities at UCR.

Placement of Interns

Over sixty students with disabilities were placed in internships in the past two years. The yearly population of students with disabilities is approximately 100 to 120. Students are eligible for internships in their junior and senior years, and some apply after graduation.

Transportation of Interns

Transportation to and from the work site can pose problems for any student. For students confined to a wheelchair, it can be the deciding factor that prevents them from interning. The first year of the project, several students were unable to accept internships because they lacked transportation. An accessible van was available to transport students to and from the classes through the Handicapped Students Services Office of the University. However, because of heavy scheduling, often the van was not available for internship use. The public transportation system proved unsatisfactory because of limited routes and poor accessibility.

FIPSE* provided the answer to this problem in allowing excess funds from the first year of operation to be allocated to the leasing of an accessible van. The University purchased this van at the end of the federal funding period. It has several special features, including tinted windows on all sides for safety and comfort, a bubble top allowing for an additional fifteen inches of headroom, a side door opening with a hydraulic wheelchair lift, four wheelchair tie-down strips, air conditioning with an emergency backup system (important to quadrapalegics in the southern California heat), radial tires and heavy duty suspension to reduce sway.

Provisions were made in the second year of the project for student drivers to work twenty hours per week. Depending upon the scheduling of the internships and the location of the sites, between six and ten students were transported to and from internships each week.

*Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education

Career Development

The Academic Internship Program provides a strong link in the career planning process for students with disabilities. It gives students work experience who have never worked before. It provides them the opportunity to prove to themselves and to employers that they can do the job. It gives them valuable contacts in their chosen field.

However, the career planning process starts long before placement in an internship. Students who have little or no direction may take vocational tests at the Counseling Center, may see a counselor at the Career Planning and Placement Center or use the Career Library. Students are encouraged to attend career seminars at which employers describe various occupations. Further, students can contact graduates with disabilities for information on their career experiences.

When students with disabilities are about to graduate, Career Planning and Placement Center personnel make every effort to serve as placement advocates. Workshops on resume writing and interviewing techniques are offered each quarter. In addition to the general information given in these sessions, there are discussions of such questions as: How does one present a disability to an employer? Should it be mentioned in the resume or cover letter? How should the subject be broached in an interview?

Students are encouraged to interview with campus recruiters. The career counselor may approach recruiters to brief them on the students with disabilities that they will be interviewing. The internship coordinator, in contacts with the community, is always watching for openings that might suit a particular graduating student.

Thus, from freshman year through graduation and placement, students with disabilities are encouraged to take advantage of the full range of career development support services, from vocational testing and career counseling, to internships and eventual placement.

Education and Information Sharing Activities

Conferences

Two conferences were held for employers, one in July of 1978, approximately half way through the project, and one in June of 1979, close to the end of the project. The purpose of the first conference was to share information about the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which mandates hiring persons with disabilities and making buildings and facilities accessible to them.

The second conference with the theme, "A Plan for Action: Hiring the Handicapped", stressed updated legislation, tax credits for building modifications, model affirmative action programs, compliance procedures, and the career needs and aspirations of persons with disabilities.

Workshops and Seminars

Periodically workshops and seminars were held on the campus for small groups of employers. At other times, the Coordinator conducted workshops at the employer's site or made presentations to employer groups and organizations. Visits to individual employers continue this education process.

In addition, printed materials, video tapes, and the film "A Different Approach" were all available to employers and others through the University.

Support Services

Other University services available to special students are the following: the Counseling Center, the Learning and Study Skills Center, the Adaptive Physical Education Program, the Health Center, and the Wheelchair Repair Center. In addition, the Disabled Students Union plans meetings and activities to involve students in campus life.

Allied Professionals

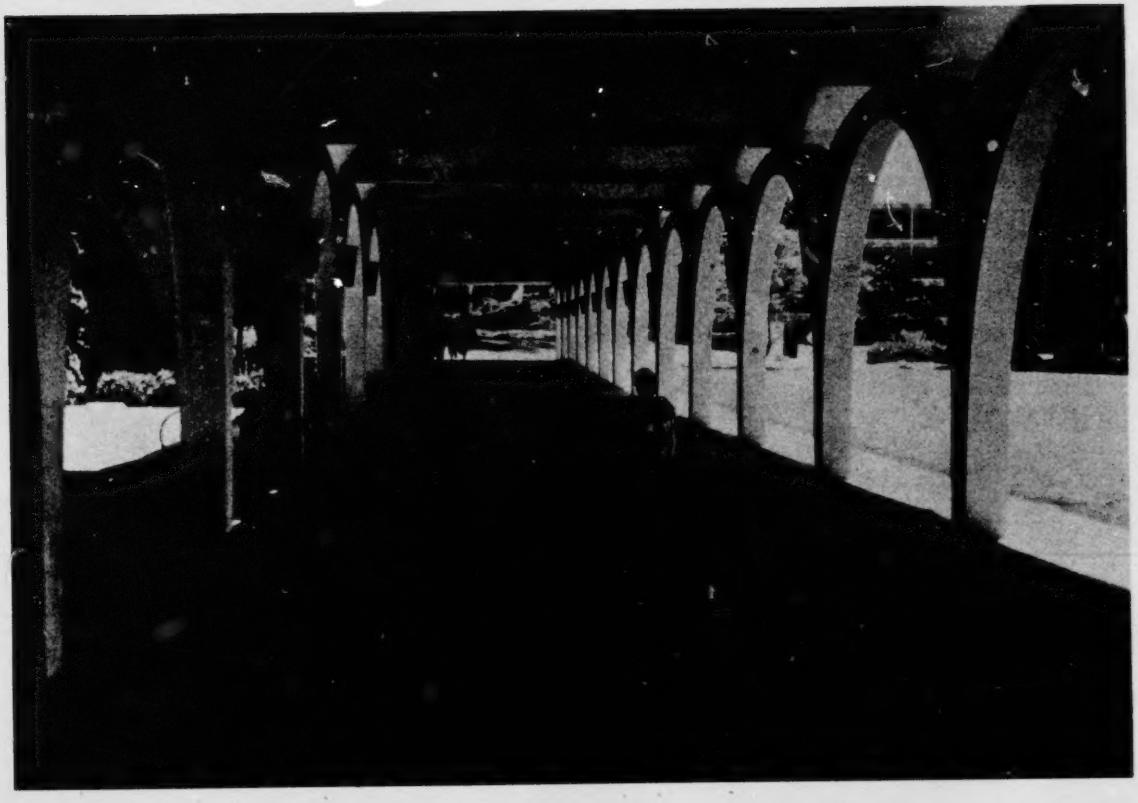
The Coordinator of the project worked closely with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Several meetings were held on campus and at the local D.V.R. offices to coordinate career planning for students. The internship program is strongly supported by rehabilitation counselors because it is re-

lated to one of their goals for clients which is to make them self-supporting.

Future Plans

As project funds from FIPSE terminated in July of 1979, the University took the following actions:

1. Assumed the funding of the position, Coordinator of the Academic Internship Center for Students with Disabilities. The Center staff will continue with the development of the employer network and the placement of students in internships.
2. Provided funds for transportation to and from internships.
3. Provided career counseling for students so that they would continue to receive assistance in resume writing, interviewing techniques, and job placement.
4. Continued dissemination of information about the employment of persons with disabilities and the internship program.



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